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# HISTORY OF SREE GURUVAYUR TEMPLE

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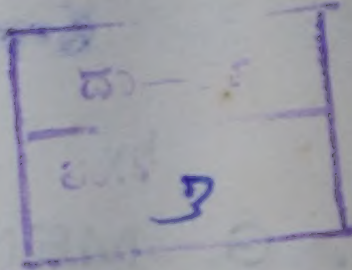
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FOREWORD

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## SREEKRISHNAYA NAMAH

### FOREWORD

There are books and guides enough both in Malayalam and English about the Glory of Lord Krishna and his Sanctified abode some elaborate yet others too concise. This hand book is intended especially for readers, coming on pilgrimage to Guruvayur from outside Kerala who are not Conversant with Malayalam. I know that they do not have the time and patience to devote enough for big reading and, as I do not want to tax their patience, I have tried to make it as brief as possible not forgetting, at the same time, to describe all the important facts and conspicuous events.

I have referred Sri T. G. Menon's book in Malayalam and my thanks are due to them and the publishers, messers Santha Book Stall, Guruvayur and Palghat

Incidentally this book happens to be my first attempt and I am gratified that I did write something about Guruvayurappa, and I shall be all the more gratified if it serves the public in any way.



## CHAPTER I

### **The Glory of the Idol and the Sanctity of the temple**

Bharathavarsha has always been a land of religions. Nowhere in the world you can see faiths thriving side by side tolerating each other, any respecting one another and letting live in harmony. Hinduism, the eldest sister has ever been loved and respected for her fostering patronage by the sister religions at all times. There were terrific onslaughts by invading armies, heavy impact of foreign religions and diversity of ideologies, but Hinduism has withstood all tempests and held aloft its mast ~~no~~ the dismay of all antagonists.



Oh, the undying religion! In this age of science, some people have begun to question the importance of the place of temples in religions. The logic and the dynamic force of spiritualism seem to dwindle before them; but there is nothing like faith. India is practically littered with Sacred shrines and holy places of pilgrimages and the number of devotees frequenting them is ever on the increase even in this wavering yuga and surely this must open the eyes of the unbeliever, for it has always done so, I can say with the least fear of contradiction that our temples have played the most important part in sustaining Hinduism.

As a rule pilgrims visit holy places at particular seasons and on special occasions; but Guruvayur is an exception and there is an unceasing flow of crowd into this Sacred Abode of Krishna throughout the year. Once you enter the temple precincts you feel a divine halo pervading the whole place and attracting the worshippers. There are far more imposing structures in our country, but the simple yet fine shrine is unique in itself and no wonder,



According to the Mahabhagavatha the Sacred Idol is the same which was originally presented by Mahavishnu to Brahma who, later, gave it to the Kashyapa couple believed to be reborn in their third regeneration in the persons of Devaki and Vasudevar who also, by the divine blessings of the Lord, came in possession of the Vighraha and consecrated it in a shrine at Dwaraka and eventually, Lord Krishna although Himself an Avatar, worshipped it.

Now that His earthly mission was coming to a close, the Lord confided to and enjoined his foremost disciple Udhavar to seek the help of Guru and Vayu to rescue the idol from the imminent submerge of Dwaraka and instal it in a fitting place in Bhargavakshetra for the benefit of mankind in Kaliyuga.

So Brahaspathi took charge of the Sacred Idol and travelling far and wide accompanied by Vayu, at last espied a beautiful spot with a fine crystal lotus lake in the midst of rich follages of coconut palms. They thought they were rewarded for their troubles and rested on the bank



for a while and their gratification knew no bounds when they saw Lord Siva and Parvathi at the bathing ghat, for the very Abode of Shiva was on the other extremity of the lake, the place now known as Mammiyur. Parameswar greeted and welcomed them and expressed His approval in selecting the bank as the most suitable Abode for the Lord and, accordingly, consecration of the Sacred Idol was consummated and the place became known as Guruvayupuram or Guruvayur, after Guru and Vayu.

The Present tank at the northern side of the Temple is only a miniature of the original lake which stretched from Guruvayur to Mammiyur. The holy water has curative powers and is a radical cure of many an ailment. The faith of the devotees is so great that even a patient stricken with fever does not ever hesitate to bathe in this tank!

The name and fame of Guruvayurappa has been resounding far and wide for centuries and there is reference of it even in the Mahabharata. King Janamejaya was out to wreak his vengeance



on the serpent-world for the untimely death of his father parikshit from the fangs of a cobra and he performed a Sarpa yajna. As a consequence of the sin derived from this Yajna he was caught by leprosy of the most virulent type. All attempts of cure proved futile and at last he sought the Advice of the Sage Dattathraya Who counselled him that the only cure was the worship of Guruvayurappa. Accordingly, the king set out to Guruvayur, and after continued tapasya for about four months recouped his health.

The glorification of the Idol is indescribable. Although the installation of the Idol was consecrated as long back as that, the shrine was dedicated only at a later period by a pandyan King some five hundred years ago. According to his horoscope, the king was destined to die of snake bite; but he was confident that Guruvayurappa could help him. So he took refuge at Guruvayur and spent day and night in meditation and prayer at the feet of the Lord until that fatal period was over. He returned to his place and sent for the court astrologer and spoke to him. 'You said the foretelling was unambiguous and



that the horoscope was unerring; but heream I hale and hearty. What have you to say to that?' The wise man bowed low and explained. 'My forecast was all too sure. At that ordained time a serpent did ~~do~~ thing you. Look at the mark on your left foot. You did not feel it as you were wholly absorbed in the Lord who alone can dispense with Fate.' The king was now more devoted in the Lord than ever before and lost no time in starting to Guruvayur again, this time, to build a proper shrine setting apart adequate funds for the daily routine expenses of the temple by rich donations in property and gold. At later periods and different stages extensions to the temple have been made by various rich devotees and the present temple in its fine simplicity, but ever superbly grand, towers there to ward off the evils of Kaliyuga and save mankind from Adharma: Glory, glory unto thee, My Lord!

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## CHAPTER II

General administration of the Temple

The Routine of Worship offerings

Customs and Usages of the place

ADMINISTRATION:-According to the popular belief, the temple was originally managed by 72 Illoms of Nambudiris of Guruvayur and the surrounding localities which gradually became extinct one by one until at last only one family, namely Mallisseri Mana survived, so much so, that Illom became the sole manager or owner of the temple the properties of the defunct families naturally being appropriated to the Devaswom. The Zamorian of Kozhikode, gradually began to interfere in the temple affairs and, by virtue of his then overlordship of the district virtually became



the managing trustee, Mallisseri Mana automatically becoming a co-trustee only in name. It is one of the richest temple in Kerala having properties fetching about 10 lacs as annual income besides collecting thousands of rupees every month through its Bhandarams. A Manager assisted by a well-run office looks after the temple affairs and, considering the convenience and requirements of the ever increasing influx of pilgrims, there is specially a superintendent to look after everything inside the temple. He holds his office at the eastern Gopuram helped by an efficient staff whose duty it is to see everything connected with the offerings of the devotees. The authorities have built a big satram at the eastern Nanda with modern conveniences and rooms could be hired at moderate charges.

THE ROUTINE of WORSHIP: A short description of the structure and outlay of the temple would be great help for getting a general idea about the routine of worship. The temple is surrounded by strong walls with two imposing Gopurams on the eastern and western sides. As already said



the temple superintendent has his office at the eastern entrance leading to a grand decorated Nadappura (pandal). The first thing that attracts your attention is a big Belikallu (granite slab) dedicated to Guru and Vayu. In front of this is the golden flag- (Dhwaja - stampha). It is here that different collection boxes are placed and important ceremonies such as marriages 'Thulabharams' and children's rice-giving rituals are conducted. The pandal is richly and attractively decorated, but the whole atmosphere is filled with awe and reverence inspiring piety. The pictures of famous devotees are the most prominent of all. A fine artistic painting of the late padmanabhan, a noble elephant of the Devaswom (there are now twenty or twenty-one of them,) adorns a prominent place. To the west and on top of the pandal stands the picture of Narasimha adding piety and confidence in the Lord to the devotees. The fine painting of Mahatma Gandhi cannot go unnoticed.

**MATHILAKAM:** From the Nadappura, Let us get acquainted with the courtyard. The flag-staff stands aloft in the centre facing the entrance to



the shrine. The Koothampalam is situated at the South eastern corner. Koothu is a special Natya Peculiar to Kerala. Koothu is held only during 'Mandalam' and 'Vaisakh' season and ordinarily, Bhagavatha 'Parayana' by reputed scholars is conducted here. Then we come across with a tiny shrine dedicated to 'Sastha' to the north western side of the Koothampalam. Rows of buildings can be seen on the northern, western and parts of the southern sides of the courtyard. the upstairs of the building at the south is the residence of the High Priest, and one of the lower rooms is the Treasure room, A part of the western Gopuram is used as the store room and portion to the north is the kitchen attached to the Agrasala. Outside the main outer walls and to the north-eastern corner is the shrine of the Goddess Durga.

**SANCTUM SANCTORUM:-** We now again come to the flag-staff. Let us enter the inner precincts (Usually only Brahmins used to use this passage the non-Brahmins using the passage at the northern side from the courtyard) On either side of the-



passage is a Vathilmadam, a place where Brahmins perform their daily devotions and Namaskarams. This leads passage to the Mandapam and the Sreekoil beyond. The Arattukettippadi' was the favourite spot of the great devotee and scholar, Melpathur Bhattadiri who had spent his last days in composing Narayaneeyam and is now looked upon as a Sacred place.

The Vathilmadams cover the whole of the eastern side of the 'Sreekoil' and all the other sides are surrounded by strong masonry work with just enough space in between for devotees to go round. On the southern side to the eastern end lies the temple kitchen where alone the Nivedyams are cooked. On the south western side is a small Sreekoil dedicated to Lord Vigneswara. Paintings of mythic stories are found in abundance on the walls and a fine painting, of the Lord in Ananthasayanam pose on the wall of the western Chittu is particularly worthy of note. Anybody would be surprised at the heaps of Sandal paste being prepared by a regular hand of Namboodir is almost at all hours of the day.



Thousands of rupees are being spent by the Davaswom on this item alone every year.

At the eastern side of the entrance from the North, there is a ho'y spot called Nritham. The foremost of scholarly devotees Vilwamangalam Swamiyar used to occupy this selected spot for his meditations and it is popularly believed that he used to dance in ecstasy and always enjoyed the company of the Lord after Tripuka. To the south of this is the Temple well. The water is crystal clear at all season and is of outstanding taste which could be distinguished from all others and of digestive and certain other curative powers. It is belived that it is consecrated by the Prathista of Varuna. Many a pilgrim foregoes his tea or coffee in preference to his well water.

The cons'ruction of the Sreekoil baffies all human skil and workmanship seemingly hidden by the Deepasthambham, Flag staff and the big Belikallu yet the Idol is clearly visible from a distance and thus the belief that the shrine was built by the divine architect Viswakarma gains ground



**THE ROUTINE OF POOJAS-** The Pooja systems at Guruvayur are too elaborate and sastraic. It is believed that Sri Sankaracharya had revised the whole system and the whole of the present routine is as enforced by him. The coordinated work of a regular band of purohiths, ambalavasis etc. make up the staff for the poojas. There is a High priest. If assistant poojas, a tantrik and a four othikans. They are the only persons allowed to enter the Sreekoil. Still more, only the high priest the Tantrik and the othikans are only privileged to touch the Idol. In cases of doubts regarding any ritual, the verdict of the Tantrik is final. The High priest is required to observe strict Brahmacharya and, generally, he cannot leave the temple walls. The assistant poojaris. 'Kizhusanthi' help him in the preparation of Nivedyams and Sandal paste. They come from certain hereditary families. Then comes a number of Ambalavasis from various privileged families of warriors, Nambissans, pisharodies etc whose work it is to collect flowers and such like things for the poojas. Lastly come a set of 'Pathukars.' Three of them for supplying (this is their privilege)



everything required for us within the temple each man for every ten days in the month.

Usually, there are five poojas, and, all the three excepting the Panthiradi' are performed by the High priest of melsanti himself, the frís, of these commence at the end of the third yama ie-exactly at 3-00 a m. and the Lord is awakened from his slumber with the melodious notes of Nadaswarom. To have a barshan of the lord before being bereft of the previous days Alamkaras is considered to be extremely holy. A reasonable time is allowed by the High priest to the worshippers to have darshan in this posture, Then he conducts the 'Abhisheka' from a golden jar. Another 'Abhisheka' follows with gingely oil. The oil is then softly brushed away and 'Sankhabhisekam' follows and then 'Malar' nivedyam. This goes on till about 6-30 a. m when the doors of the Sreekoil are closed for 'Usha' or morning pooja for about half an hour when the doors are again opened for darshan, when the deity is taken out for 'Shiveli' (procession) A miniature Idol of the Lord in gold in



carried on the back of an elephant with 12 lighted lamps in front three rounds arounds the mathilakam. To hold these 12 lighted lamps is a previlege of certain ambalavasi families of the locality. The procession is accompanied by a harmoniaus combination of 'Vadyams' of drums, Nadaswaram, Madhalms etc. The Melsanti leads the procession in the first round, offering nive-dyams to the differetnt Belikallus. The morning Shiveli is over by about 7 30 a. m. Then Kshee rabhishekam commences at about 8-30 a m. There are many devotees who have made it a ruie to offer milk for this Abhishekam. Tender coco-nuts as also rose water are offered for this.

After 'Ksheerabhisheka' is the 'Navakabhi. sheka' and then 'Panthirati nivedyam and pooja usually between 9 and 9 30 a. m. The next pooja is the 'Usha' (midday) pooja, the most important pooja of the day, which comes to an ned by about 12-30 and the Sreekoil is closed for the time being. Then, by about 5-50 p m the Sreekoil is again opend, when there is another Siveli as in the morning. With the blowing of couch-shells at



dusk, 'Deeparathana' follows. The Athazha Nivedyam and pooja usually commence at 8 p m. At the close of the Athazha pooja. The golden idol is taken round in procession for the third time in the day. The day's routine of pooja comes to a close with the 'Trippuka (burning of incense) and the Sreekoil is closed and locked for the day by about 10-30 p. m.

**VAZHIVADU:-** (offering) The number of devotees coming to Guruvayur for darshan from distant countries is increasing day by day and it would be helpful to them if they are made acquainted with the location of the place. Shoranur Pattambi, Wadakancheri and Trichur, all southern railway stations, are the nearest station where the pilgrims may alight. There are bus service at convenient intervals from these station to Guruvayur, 30 miles from shoranur, 21 miles from Pattambi and 19 miles from Wadakancheri and Trichur. The bus stops at the western Nada of the temple and accomodation is available in the sathram (choultry) at the eastern Nada on moderate charge

The votaries do not have any difficulty in paying for and booking their offerings. The temple superintendent's office is open at all hours of the day at the eastern Gopuram. The staff is always ready to help the pilgrims in all possible ways. There are a variety of offerings. A printed receipt is issued for money paid in for any offering. A few of the important offerings with their minimum charges are listed below, the amount could be increased according to the mite of the votaries

1	Palpayasam (Milk kheer or pudding)	1—00
2	Sarkara (Gurh) payasam	1—00
3	Appam or Modakam	1—00
4	Ada	1—00
5	Venna (Butter) Nivedyam	0—50
6	Thrimathuram (mixture of Bananas, Gurhand coconut chippings)	0—50
7	Paladapradhaman (Milk kheer With Ada)	5—00
8	Mala (flower garlands) of sorts, like Thulasi, Techhi etc	25 Paise to above
9	Nirama'ia	9—00



10 Naivilakku (Lamp lighted in Ghee within the shrine )

11 Azhal 1-00. This is an offering especially for the Durga

12 Vella Nivedyam 0-50 Hundreds of devotees make this offering daily. The prasadam of cooked rice is distributed among the poor. This is a very important offering and there are many rich devotees who have arranged with the Devaswami authorities to conduct this nivedyam for long periods even permanently so that the, so-to-say, permanent poor devotees at the holy place may be fed.

13 Malar nivedyam 0 20

14 Chandanacharithu (Smearing the Idol with Sandal paste) 10—0

15 Kalabhacharithu Rs 20 00 arrangements for this offering should be made the previous day.

16 Sahasranamarchana 3—00

17 Sooktarchana 10—0

18 There are different kinds of Abhishekams such as Rose water, Tender coconut water, milk

should be entrusted at the Nalampalam before Navakam, Thirtham could not be got back and no need to obtain a receipt for this.

19 Oil Abhishekam. Arrangement for this should be made the previous day. Oil bottled and corked should be entrusted with the authorities with a nominal charge of 6 pais per nazhi and receipt obtained. The receipt has to be produced the next morning when you get back the oil. This oil imbibes a medicinal value and is radical cure for chronic headaches.

20 Thulabharam This is offering articles equivalent to the votary's own weight. Anything from water to precious jewels may be made an offering according to the votary's prayer. One can bring the articles to the temple himself or pay for it when the authorities would arrange to procure them for the individual. A nominal fee of Re. one is charged for this. The articles thus received are sold at public auction and the proceeds credited to the Devaswom.

21 Children's rice feeding: It is common that devotees conduct the rice giving ceremony in



the vicinity of the Lord. The nominal charge is Re 1/-.. It is performed during 'Panthirali', 'Uchapooja' or Athazhapooja. The fee has to be paid in at the superintendent's office and a receipt obtained. The devotee is seated near the Flag-staff before lighted lamp facing west with the child in the lamp. A nominal amount, say 25 paisa or so has to be put in the lamp as oil charegs and when it is time, the Brahmin in charge comes from within with the Thirutham and pours it in the mouth of the child and sandal paste is smeared. Then the mother, father or guardian feeds it a little of the nivedyam. Dakshina is given to the Brahmin.

22 Marriages: The custom of performing marriages at the temple is given on in an ever-increasing scale now a days. The charge is Rs 7-50 and this amount has to be paid in at the office and receipt obtained in time. In addition Dakshina has to be made to the Brahmin who brings the garland, Thirutham etc. There are a few convenient hotels near the temple where feasting for the parties should be arranged at moderate rates.

23 Chittuvilakku: Generly, during Athazha Siveli the thousands of Tiny lamps in rows are lighted. Some rich devotees make special offering for full illumination. Oil or Ghee can be used. This is a bit costly, but very dear to Guruvayurappan. The authorities will have this satisfactorily for you on payment of a minimum of RS. 800/-

24 'Alroopam'; Miniature images in siliver or gold are placed before the Lord of offerings. This is quite a common offering. A devotee makes this offering for getting remedy for any defect in the limbs. The 'Alroopams' can be obtained within the temple itself on payment of a nominal charge according to one's mite.

25 'Namaskaran' and 'Athazhams' rich davotees spend large sums of moneny to feast the Brahmins in the temple. Morning feast the Namaskaram and the evening feast Athazham. A feast generally costs about Rs. 250/-

26 'Udayastamana pooja': This is a very costly affair. The routine of poojas are very elaborate commencing from sun - rise to Suset,



entailing 21 poojas. This is very highly propitiations. but only very rich men could afford it. Minimum charges will come to about Rs. 3500/-

27 Donation of elephants. Donating an elephant is also very costly. Besides the cost of the elephant, the sundry charges for the conduct of ceremony will come to about Rs 1500/ But this also is a common offering from rich and Lords. There are at present 20 or 21 of such elephants in the temple

28 Miscellaneous offerings. Guruvayurappan is pleased with any kind of offering, big or small is done wholeheartedly and with devotion. Small coins, sovereigns, ornaments or jewels make no difference. Cows and calves are also favourite offerings. The Lord cares more for devotion of the offerer than the value of articles offered. There is many legend to show that Krishna is even at the beck and call of a real devotee. of these, I will deal separately.



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## CHAPTER III

### IMPORTANT FESTIVALS

Unlike most other temples, any day at Guruvayur bears a festive appearance and the influx of worshippers is increasing day by day, especially so during the two important seasons or 'Vaisakh' and 'Mandalam'. The Mandalam begins from the 1st of Vrichigom or 'Karthigai' month lasting for 40 days: a season of exceptional importance. There is a terrible rush of pilgrims at all hours of the day. It would seem that rich devotees struggle themselves in giving sumptuous feasts to Brahmins which is considered to be particularly fitting during the



season devotees form far and wide invariably make it a point to have darshan of the Lord at least once during Mandalam. Abhisheka of 'Panchagavya' is a special item during the season and this is freely distributed at Tirtham among the devotees. Who consider themselves extremely lucky in getting an opportunity of partaking of this holy Tirtham. Kalashabhishekam is a special feature on the concluding day of the mandalam which is performed only once a year and at this season and which is a hereditary privilege of the Zamorin Raja.

Ekadasi Mahotsavam: Ekadasi Mahotsavam is the most important of all the festivals during the mandalam season. Observance of Ekadasi is popularly believed to be very sacred among all sects of Hindus, and Guruvayur Ekadasi coming off in this season, especially so. It is commonly believed that Sreekrishna divulged the secrets of the holy Gita to Arjuna on this particular day.

The utsavam actually begins more than a fortnight before the Ekadasi day. Elaborate processional illumination at night are special

features. The rows of tiny lamps in the 'Chittu' and the pillars of lights, 'Deepastambhams' would be profusely lighted. The full illumination of the deep stambham at the eastern Nada, a huge pillar of lights, donated by the late Chittur Sankaran Nair, is a sight worth seeing.

The 'Vilakku' is an expensive affair. All the vilakkus, during the Ekadasi season are conducted by other people from a long time as Vazhivadus. It has now become a hereditary privilege to those incumbents. The most important of those is the Ekadasi vilakku falling to the lot of Chiralayam Raja a petty chief of Kunnamkulam. Certain special poojas 'Udayasisthamna' a grand procession with richly caparisoned elephants and a profusion of drummers and pipers from about 9 p. m. to 1 p. m. and unsurpassed illuminations are special features on the occasion. The crowd on Dasami and Ekadas days swells to such proportion making it imperative that police arrangements have to be resorted to regulate the swarm. The sanctity of the Ekadasi day is so great that devotees believe



that sins of a life time are washed away one happens to see the Ekadasi Vilakku.

**VAISAKH:** To have darshan the Lord during this season is considered highly auspicious, It is for 30 days, commencing from the New moon day.

**UTSAVON:** This comes off for 10 days in the month of Kumbhom or Masi. The sightseeing and pageantry are simply fascinating. Luxurious feasting, grand processions and lavish illuminations are special features during these 10 days. The inauguration day falls on the — 'Pooyam-Star in Kumbhom. After a variety of poojas and special rituals, the Flag-hoisting ceremony takes place at about 11.30 p. m.

From the following day onwards there are 3 Shivelis every day, 8 to 10 a. m. in the mornings 2 to 5.30 p. m. in the afternoon, and, 10 p. m. to 1 p. m. at night with the attendance of 5 caprisoned elephants and a harmonious combination of vadyams. The 10th day is the 'Arati'. The 8th day is considered to be the most auspicious day of the Utsava season for

**Darshan** The 9th and 10th day, the Deity is taken out of the pack of and elephant round the banks of temple tank in procession. At the time of the Lord's a dip in the holy water amidst chanting of Mantras on the 10th night thousands of people dip themselves too. This is thought to be highly purifying utsava is very expensive, about two thousands rupees per day and the whole expenses are met with by the Devaswom funds except for the 6th day which is a vazhivadu of the Punnathur Raja, a neighboring chief.

The elephant race is a very interesting incident connected with the flag-hoisting ceremony. All the Devaswom elephants are taken out in line and posted at the extremity of the eastern Nada.. Just at the time of the 'Muhurtham' they are cautioned to race towards the temple and the elephant the that reaches first and touches the flag-staff holds a place of honour for the next 1 day. Big crowds gather on either side of the street to watch these huge creatures struggling with their cumbersome flights-a sight really enjoyable.

There is a short story behind the elephant-race. Although the Devaswom now owns a



number of elephants, there was a time long before that they had to depend on hired elephants for the ceremony. One year, they could get no elephant at all as the utsavam of a certain other temple was at the same time and everyone thought that the ceremony had to be done without the service of an elephant; but to and behold, as the ceremony was nearing, an elephant was found racing on its own accord followed by the bewildered Mahouts, towards the temple on entering the Nadappura, the elephant calmly took its place near the flag-staff. The all pervading power of Guruvayurappa was manifested. Ever afterwards, this elephant race is invariably held every year to commemorate this incident.

**VISHU** - Vishu falls on the 1st of Medam or Chithirai. This is new year's day for the Malayalees, who, as a rule, make it a point to set their eyes on awakening, specially on that early dawn, only on auspicious things and some people usually go to temples over night to make this more conveniently secure and Guruvayur is a favoured centre. The crowd at the temple that day is everwelcoming.

ASHTAMIROHINI.-Lord Krishna took his 'Avatar' on this day in Ghingom or Avani and needless to say that day is considered to be of great importance and observed in a festive manner. Niramaly and Vilakku on a grand scale are marked conspicuous on that day. The repasses for this are met with by the staff of the Devaswom office.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE GOLDEN FLAG-STAFF

Flag-hoisting in temples as every where the ralds and importance of certain special occations. Every temple invariably celebrates its 'Utsava' once a year. Generally the season lasts for 8 to 10 days. The flag is hoisted on the commencing day and lowered down at the end of the season. It is a very elaborate process. Special poojas and prolnoged chanting of 'Mantras, as laid down in the sastras have to be performed by the 'Tantri' before it is hoisted like observation have to be strictly followed on the last day of the Utsavom when it is lowered.

But, most of our temples do not have any permanent Flag-staffs. Generally, they are im-

provided of arecanut trees. After lowering down the flag on the last day of festive season, the flag staff, as a rule, is lowered down in the temple tank according to practice.

Only certain rich and important temples have permanent Flag-staff and Guruvayur is one of the few. It is single piece of long, about 70Ft. long, of uniform thickness from bottom to top, last for a very long time. A similar one is hard to find and it is believed, does not exist in the forests with the Lord's will, everything is made possible

The old Dhvajastampha which was more than 100 years old and which was plated with Bell-metal was replaced by the present one, plated in gold, some eight years back after some 10 years continued efforts in getting the necessary gold and money expended on that .00 and add tolas of gold and more than 25 thousand rupees have been spent on this. Collections had far exceeded the actual expenditure

The log of wood inserted in the old Stambha was supposed to be an extraordinary one. It was believed that it was 'Kurumthoti' a medicinal



herb that generally does not grow more than 3 or 4 ft. high: but this wonderful one was, somehow, procured from Nilampur forests. such was the faith of the devotees until the last moment when they were disillusioned. On examining, it was proved to be ordinary Teak-wood.

As said before the present flag is Teak-wood about 70 Ft. long, straight and wonderfully of Uniform thickness not too thick but old and hard enough to stand for a long time. This was procured after prolonged enquiriv; with other states and sustained efforts of hardy mountaineers who had been searching in the forests for a long period.

This was found in the forests of Malayattur then owned by the Maharaja of Teavancore who the Government coffers as its value from the private funds. The leader of the party who had first set his eyes on the venerable tree was, reminded of the Puranic 'Kadambu' on the bank of the 'Kalindi', and had exclaime with wonder and reverence - 'This sadhu had been under the cruse of some short-tempered sage and Krishna has at last given him 'Mukti'

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## CHAPTER V

### HINDU CULTURE

Culture and civilization. although different from each other both have very much in common yet, sometimes a civilized country cannot boast of its culture. To some, this may sound incredible, but 'the strange reality is a simple truth.

To the Hindu world, Culture is based on Religion. The Hindus have acquired their present culture through thousands of years practice of their customs and manners as enjoined in their religion and through their temples. The different observation of rituals ceremonies, festivals and what more, the seemingly more entertainments at our temples have actually been the prop-



and mainstay of our faith and helped sustain our undying religion through the vicissitudes of ages. The construction and general atmosphere of our temples are such that every piece of architecture, every painting is symbol of Hindu culture. The Hindus have always paid special attention in keeping our temples. In good condition and maintaining periodical repairs. The guruvayur temple was rebuilt some 500 years ago by a Pandyan king as said before. At a later period one of the Zamorins rebuilt the shrine and the Mandapam. It is at a later period, about a hundred years back, another Zamorin, under a co-trusteeship contract with Mallisseri Nambudiri, a very rich Jenmi, built the outer buildings etc. as seen today and got the roofing copper plated.

What is noteworthy above everything is that, the usual seasonal festivals and other customs have always been strictly observed without the slightest deviation. These practices have had telling effects in infusing piety and implanting the root of culture in the devotees in particular,

and generally on the Hindu world. Of all practices at the Guruvayur temple, the following features have chiefly helped cement the natural tendencies and uphold our culture aloft.

**KOOTHU:-**Koothu is a special art of Natya peculiar to Malabar. Kootdu is invariably held during the 'Vaisakhi' and 'Mandalam' seasons at the Koothambalam. The artist necessarily has to be an adept in the art of Natya, a profound scholar good at oratory besides being the ~~th~~ ~~ug~~ in social religious and political affairs. Stories of educative value from Puranic ~~thanes~~ and clever expositions held to the pindrop silence of the ~~th~~ ~~ro~~ ~~ing~~ audience. He has a privileged tongue, though sometimes very pungent. This naturally had a healing effect on the corrupt practices of society and the consequent evil influences thereof on the coming generations.

**BHAGAWATA PARAYANAM** - On ordinary days the 'Koothambalam' is used in holding discourses on Bhagavatha. Eminent scholars from far and wide come down to Guruvayur some even spe-



cial invitations, to expound the secret interpretations of Puranic lore to the enlightenment of the hearers

Krishnanattom:- This art of Natya is in a way something like the dramatic 'Kathakali' Though familiar to Kerala, it is peculiar to the Guruvayur temple, and it was expressly meant for performance at this temple. A regular troupe is maintained by the Zamorin. It is dealt with in 8 stories, 'Avatar, Kaliya mardana, Rasakreeda, Kamsa-Vadha, Swayamvara-Bana yudha. Vividha-vadha and Swargarchana intended for 8 days play. But as it was considered inauspicious to stop at Swargarohana, 'Avatar' is enacted over again on the ninth day and so. Usually it goes on for 9 days. Devotees crowd in thousands to enjoy the play and they always take inspiration from these stories

The play is inaugurated at Kozhikode in the place of the Zamorin in the beginning of the month of that and then the troupe comes down to Guruvayur, There are a few selected families of

rich Namboodiris who are also given the privilege of conducting this play. The 'Attam' over at Guruvayur, the party travels back to Kozhikode after holding shows at their Illoms enroute and the year's performance is over.

There is an interesting episode about the origin of 'Kathakali'. Some hundreds of years back, there lived at Kottarakara, in Trvancore: a prominent chief who was a lover of arts. He had never seen Krishnattom and he requested the Zamorin to send the troupe to his place. This was a deviation from old customs and the Zamorin expressed his inability to do so. The Kottara-ara Raja got wild over this and he inaugurated a similar Natya which has taken the present form of Kathakali—really a blessing in disguise.

It is now needless to emphasize the importance of all these and the far-reaching effects they have had on the Hindu religion and Hindu culture. The continuance of these arts and the Bhagawataparayana have been found extremely helpful specially in the Kaliyuga. The Deva-swom authorities felt the need to organise an



institution itself to perpetuate our culture and some 10 years ago, in may 1949, the Akhilakerala Sanatana Cultural Association was inaugurated and it is working, wonderfully well. The 'Sammelan' is held every year and learned Pandits attend the session and ably divulge the essence of Sanatanaa Dharma and hold learned discourses and vedas and upanishads and enlighten the audience on the value of religion and attendant culture

In this Kaliyuga, a few may not give sufficient credence to this Faith. It would be worthwhile to take refuge in the 'Gita'. In the preamb'e, what did Sreekrishna impress on Arjuna? He said 'Whenever Adharma is on the ascendant and Dharma is declining I incarnate myself from time to time uphold Dharma and save mankind from the evils of Adharma'. The evils as enumerated in the Puranas attendant on Kaliyuga are too manifest at this age. Civilisation has advanced to such an extent and scientific discoveries to alarming proportions and although a few Nations have perfected more than Atom bombs, there is not an

atom of culture with some of them. The ancient countries that stood in the fore-front in civilization, as also culture, were Egypt. India and China ( in a sense, Russia is a new nation;) but of late: culture in its true sense, also, is beginning to be conspicuously absent from that country and why? One protected by God, stands unprotected and with all the protections one could conceive, he is not protected unless favoured by the divine power. In other words, however much advanced a nation might be in civilization or possession of destructive weapons, it would be found practically of no use unless it has a religion and does not believe in the power of the Almighty God. So I do not in the least hesitate to caution the public of India general and the Hindu world in particular never to give up their faith in their religions. Religion is manifestation of divine blessings-be they Hindus, Muslims, Christians or any other religionists.

~~To~~ Lord bless you !



## CHAPTER VI

### POPULAR LEGENDS

There are many legends extolling the Glory and manifestation of the wonderful omnipresence and omnipotence of Guruvayurappa. The attached, He always guards from all evils, and the detached or indifferent. He invariably corrects. A real devotee finds himself in communion with the lord. The glorification of the Guruvayur Temple and its presiding deity reverberates through the length and breadth of the country.

We know Pooja routines were formulated by Sri Sankaracharya. The redoubtable Advaitist was travelling through the either during one of

his tours, and it is believed that it was on the Ekadasi day when the Shivali reached the northern side of the Nadapandal the sage was just passing above without taking notice of the procession. Krishna could not tolerate this indifference and all of a sudden felt his limbs paralysed and he dropped down before the Shivali. Soon recovering he realised the divine power and stayed at Guruvayur for some time and during this sojourn, he formulated the elaborate pooja routines at the temple.

During one of Tippu Sultan's sweeping marches, when the unrelenting Sultan was just trying to enter the temple in inted to plunder and defile, a thundering voice commanded him to stop. The Sultan was awe-stricken and not only he desisted from the attempt, but before leaving the spot, he caused enormous donations to be made to the Devasom from the maintenance of the temple.

Now, there are innumerable episodes magnifying his benevolence and attachment to his



devotees and I shall deal with some of them before I close my narration

It was not the custom in ancient days to allow the Harijans to enter the temple; but a special concession was allowed on the Ekadasi day. An old Brahmin was watching the host of Harijans with a wry face and Vilwamanglam Swamiyar who happened to notice it consoled the old man and asked him to touch him and then to look at the crowd. What a wonder, Every individual in the seething crowd seemed, to the old Brahmin to be an incarnation of the Lord himself!

There is a very interesting story showing that Bhakti is above everything. Poonthanam Namboodiri, a great devotee was going to dedicate his 'Jnana pana', a highly devotional work, to be perused by the Melpathur Bhattadiri who was Lord but before he did so, he wanted his book to be perused by the Melpathur Bhattadiri who was busy composing his Narayanecyam at the temple Poothanam, very reverently approached Melpathur with his humble request, but the great scholar did not deem it worth while to have a

glance at the book, for, Poonthanam, he knew was not a literary man. The poor man could not close his eyes that night for shame and anguish. The Lord's attachment to his devotee was soon manifested. The Lord appeared before the Bhattadiri that night and chiding him said 'Poonthanam's Bhakti is dearer to me than your. Vibhakti'. The great scholar now opened his eyes, and realising his folly lost no time in hastening to Poonthanam at break of day and made amends.

Two men, one a devotee of Krishna and the other, a devotee of Subrahmanya jointly planted a Banana. The understanding between them was that if the bunch spouted facing the east, the Bananas would go as an offering to Subrahmanya and if to the west, it should be offered to Guruvayurappa. But wonderfully enough, when the time came, they found that the bunch was shooting in the air. The two devotees did not know what to do. That night Subrahmanya Swami appeared to his devotee and pacified him thus 'you know Krishna is a greedy chap, so let him have it.' The next morning, the Krishna



bhakta duly took the bunch of bananas to Guruvayur and offered it to his Lord

This incident is believed to be during the time of the great soldier statesman Mangat Achan who was supposed to be travelling incognito during late hours of the night. An old man was travelling all alone with certain ornaments for his daughter to be given away in marriage very shortly. A robber confronted him on the way and was just going to relieve him of the poor man's possession when he called aloud seeking the renowned Achan's aid. Lo and behold! A stranger suddenly appeared and drove away the robber. The good old man really believed that he was one of Achan's body guards and very gladly he offered him a good ring as a present. The man accepted the offer and suddenly disappeared consoling the old man that he would not have anything to fear on his way. Next morning this ring was found lying at the step of the Sreekoil. When it was evident that the rescuer was none other than Krishna Himself.

We are already fairly acquainted with the greatness of Vithwamangalam Swamiyar, Besides

being a scholar of repute, he was one of the greatest of devotees of Krishna. Unknown to many, there was a still greater devotee at the time in the person of a pious lady called Kurur Amma. As it would be interesting to the devotees to get acquainted with their greatness, I shall stop giving one or two incidents relating to them.

An old Brahmin was ailing under a kind of chronic stomach ache for a long time. He could not eat anything and by and by, he became more and more <sup>2</sup>maciated as all attempts of ours proved futile. At last he decided to go over to Guruvayur and seek the advice of Vilwamangalam. The Swamiyar told him that the disease was incurable as it was imbibed through his Karma in the previous birth. Faint and worn out, the old man trudged back, and by midday decided to rest for a while at the verandha of a way-side house. The man was extremely thirsty and asked for water. There was only a lady within who asked the old man to take his bath, for meals were ready. The old man sadly said 'Alas! I cannot eat anything. I just want only a cup of water-I am <sup>2</sup>terribly thirsty. I am under this



malady for a long time and have given up all hope as even Vilwamangalam has proclaimed the ~~at~~ my stomach ache is incurable. The good old lady consoled the Brahmin, 'Go and have a bath and eat sumptuously. It is Kurur Amma asking you. Although the old man did not give much credence to those words, he slowly started for the tank and, the bath over hesitatingly sat at the meals. He reluctantly swallowed a morsel for, if a morsel went in, everything used to be out in his experience. Now nothing of the like happened and he swallowed morsels after more's till his stomach was full. The Brahmin rested for a while and returned home and that malady never again troubled him! The lady's sole cure was devotion to the Lord!

Now I shall narrate another incident. The endeavor is only to show what wonders real devotion cannot work. A rich family of Brahmins was going to give a feast to Vilwamangalam Swamiyar. You know a feast to Swamiyar is not an easy joke. There would be host of attendants and disciples always with him with the attendant paraphernalia. Kurur Amma also



happened to sojourn in that locality. She had been yearning to give a feast to the Swamiyar for a long time and could not have got an opportunity. She wanted to return to her native place the very next day of the appointed feast also. When she came to know that the Swamiyar had accepted the request, Kurur Amma hastily sent a boy to Vilwamangalam imploring him, for reason, stated above. That he should condescend to her guest that day to which the sage turned a deaf

ear. Kurur Amba again sent the messenger asking him to tell the Swamiyar that it was the ardent wish of the Kurur Amba that he should purify her abode by his presence. The Swamiyar could not change his programme although respected her wishes and he said a definite 'No' again. The day appointed for the feast came. Vilwamangalam got ready with all the paraphernalia for the journey. The Swamiyar was bewildered, for, he could not find Krishna there. The Lord, invariably, used to accompany Vilwamangalam wherever he went. Strangely enough, the Lord in the guise of a new attendant boy was busy, gathering flowers for 'arghya' at the Kurur Amma's





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